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**THE MEXICAN ARMY AND POLITICAL ORDER  
SINCE 1940**

David F. Ronfeldt

**RAND Corporation  
Santa Monica, California**

**September 1973**

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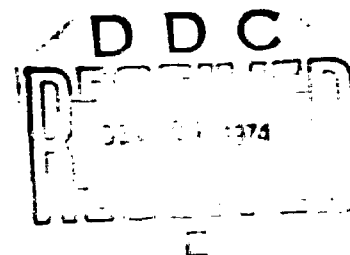
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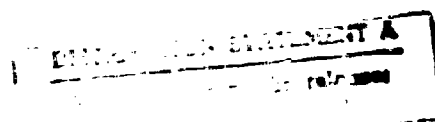
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## THE MEXICAN ARMY AND POLITICAL ORDER SINCE 1940

David F. Ronfeldt<sup>\*</sup>

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### I. INTRODUCTION BY ILLUSTRATION

The Mexican army, many feel, has become since the 1940s an increasingly professional force that obeys civilian authorities and defends the constitution in apolitical fashion. Others argue that the army has become an increasingly conservative force that still wields political influence and represses popular elements. These prevalent, opposing viewpoints reflect a quiet debate about the contemporary institutional history of the Mexican army and its impact on the course of the Mexican Revolution since 1940. The purpose of this paper is to offer a variety of partial observations and speculative impressions on this topic.

What, in fact, does the Mexican army do? What is its record in national life since the 1940s? Systematic information is lacking, but its roles may be illustrated by a variety of cases culled mainly from the recent national press.

In 1968 the army helped decisively to suppress the massive student-based riots and demonstrations that took place in Mexico City and elsewhere on the eve of the Olympics. Other *university disturbances* also led to troop patrolling during the 1960s and early 1970s, as in Morelia in 1966, Hermosillo in 1967, and Tlaxcala in 1973.

Army units have frequently been called upon to maintain order during *electoral disturbances* or to forestall the collapse of local governments. In 1952 army troops put down riots in Mexico City by partisans

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<sup>\*</sup> This paper was prepared for delivery and discussion at the IV International Congress of Mexican Studies, Santa Monica, California, October 17-21, 1973, which reserves publication rights for the version appearing in its proceedings. Though the author alone is responsible for the contents of this paper, he appreciates the helpful comments received from Luigi Einaudi, Edward Gonzalez, Elizabeth Hyman, and Brian Jenkins.

of the Federación del Partido del Pueblo Mexicano (FPPM), whose founder and candidate, Gen. Miguel Henríquez Guzmán, lost the presidential campaign. During 1960-1962, army units were needed to impose order and restrict popular turmoil in Guerrero, when governor Gen. Arturo Caballero Aburto fell and was succeeded by Raimundo Abarca Alarcón. In 1964 in Puebla the army helped to reestablish order in the wake of the milk riots, and the military zone commander was acting governor for about six weeks after the fall of governor Gen. Antonio Nava Castillo. Major violence that accompanied a gubernatorial campaign in Sonora in 1967 also led to relatively heavy troop patrolling throughout the state.

At the municipal level, the presence of army troops helped to subdue electoral disturbances during major campaigns in Mérida in 1967 and Tijuana in 1968 that were hotly contested between the official Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and rival Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN). Other incidents that involved violent or potentially violent conflicts among rivals affiliated with these and different parties occurred in Huehuetlán, Puebla in 1969, and in Tacámbaro, Michoacán in 1972. Sometimes the municipal conflict involved rival factions of the PRI, as in Ciudad Valles, San Luis Potosí in 1971, and in Santa Cruz, Tlaxcala in 1972. Other incidents that led to small unit patrolling might better be described as an uprising of townspeople against town officials and police, as in Atencingo, Puebla in 1968.

The army has been deeply involved in the control and pacification of numerous *rural political disturbances*. These have included: elections of ejidal, credit society, or cooperative officers from among polarized peasant factions; large peasant demonstrations and hunger marches, such as during the early 1960s by candelilla and ixtle gatherers from Coahuila; threatened peasant uprisings in the early 1960s in the sierras of Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, and Veracruz by FPPM affiliates; and numerous land invasions throughout Mexico, especially those led by the Central Campesina Independiente (CCI) and Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (UGOCM). More dramatically, the army has helped to hunt down, and enforce some official control over the

domains of such regionally powerful social bandits and agrarian radicals as Rubén Jaramillo (killed by an army unit in 1962), Genaro Vázquez Rojas, and currently Lucio Cabañas, whose insurgencies have had some revolutionary qualities. In early 1973, army units enabled government officials to regain physical control of the important San Cristóbal sugar mill in Veracruz and to halt a potentially violent rebellion by cañeros and outside supporters.

Though the army appears to be more active in rural than in urban areas, *industrial and labor disturbances* have also led to the use of troops. A major contemporary example is the railroad workers' strike during 1958-1959. More recently, at the end of 1972 soldiers helped to dislodge members of a rebellious railroad workers' movement from union buildings they had seized in Durango, Oaxaca, and Torreón, so that the offices could be returned to the control of the dominant, officially favored railroad workers' union. Also in 1972, military vigilance was required during elections for the leadership of the petroleum workers' union section in Poza Rica.

The army has fought the *guerrilla insurgency and urban terrorism* of aspirant revolutionaries. In the mid and late 1960s army units destroyed at least a half dozen efforts by leftist intellectuals and students to establish guerrilla *focos* in various places, most notably at Madera, Chihuahua in 1965 (and again in 1967 and 1969). In Guerrero the recent campaigns against Vázquez, Cabañas, and their allies have had counterinsurgency aspects, with the army engaging in civic action as well as strictly military activities. The army has also worked closely with the police to detect and eliminate urban terrorists and urban elements who have endeavored to organize national revolutionary movements, as in the case of the Revolutionary Action Movement (MAR) since 1971. Along the border the army also engaged in operations against Guatemalan guerrillas operating from, or retreating to, Mexican territory during 1972.

Many of the army's activities are *socio-economic and humanitarian in nature*. Their impact is strongest in isolated rural areas where the civilian bureaucracies have little presence. Soldiers help to hunt down cattle rustlers and bandit bands in the countryside, and to prevent

smuggling and narcotics cultivation. Through a long history of rural civic action, the army has engaged in health education, provided applied medicine from dentistry to minor surgery, undertaken school and road construction and repairs, dispensed food supplies and clothing as well as tools and utensils, and has also carried out reforestation programs. In recent years major civic action campaigns have been mounted in Chihuahua, Guerrero, and Yucatán. Taking over duties from civilian officials of the Finance Ministry, military officers are also now in charge of arms registration throughout the country, and head customs posts in order to halt contraband. In the wake of natural calamities such as floods and earthquakes, the army frequently provides disaster relief and protects property. Soldiers are also used to guard certain valuable economic enterprises.

In sum, these varied examples indicate that the Mexican army has been extensively -- even if perhaps only instrumentally -- involved in the promotion of public order in ways that have apparently had considerable impact on local security, political, and socio-economic conditions. Moreover, far from being intermittent or unusual, army involvement in national development since 1940 has been quite constant and enduring, even though at a relatively low level compared to most Latin American militaries.

The next two sections begin to develop an analysis of the army's political involvement. The first section attempts to specify briefly what I term the army's "residual" political roles. The next section discusses some internal military, and external political factors that may affect changes in those roles.



## II. THE RESIDUAL POLITICAL ROLES OF THE MEXICAN ARMY

The Mexican army is reputed to be one of the best "tamed" and least political in Latin America. During the 1920s-1940s the army of the Mexican Revolution was carefully reorganized and subordinated to the civilian authorities of the party-government; military coups have become virtually impracticable; and political participation by individual officers has declined over the decades.\* One prominent analyst, Edwin Lieuwen, concludes that the "political role of the army has all but disappeared."\*\*

The comparatively high degree of civilian authority cannot be denied, and the military's loss of political power is an important research topic. As the examples cited above suggest, however, the army may not be so inactive, nor the political system as highly demilitarized, as it often appears. For the post-1940 period, the historical depoliticization emphasis should not mislead the researcher into neglecting the extent and significance of the army's residual political roles, just because they are exercised in subordination to civilian ruling groups and strong political institutions.

What are the residual political roles of the military, if any? Are they policymaking or instrumental roles? How are they exercised? What is the extent of military influence? On what kinds of issues? Under what conditions? At what levels of government? Are they institutional roles, like a lobby or pressure group? Or are they the individual roles of special officers? Do such roles make much difference for

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\* According to Francisco A. Gómez Jara, *El Movimiento Campesino en México*, Editorial Campesino, México, 1970, p. 1/4, however, politician General Henríquez Guzmán considered a military coup against Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, and even approached U.S. officials in a search for support.

\*\* See Edwin Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism: The Political Rise and Fall of the Revolutionary Army, 1910-1940*, The University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1968, p. 148. Jorge Alberto Lozoya, *El Ejército Mexicano (1911-1965)*, Jornadas 65, El Colegio de México, México, 1970, goes a step further, arguing that militarism never was established in Mexico. Also see Frederick C. Turner, "México: las causas de limitación militar," *Aportes*, 6, October 1967, pp. 57-65.

the functioning of the political system? How have they changed in recent decades? Students of Mexican history offer a few paragraphs or pages of stimulating judgments about such questions. Yet none has offered convincing documentation for the post-1940 period.\*

The recentness of many of the introductory examples emphasizes a great problem for the researcher in answering even simple questions about what the army does. There is no readily accessible running

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\*Recent scholarly claims that the military has continued to have political roles are found in:

Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, *passim*.

Alberto Círia, "Cuatro ejemplos de relaciones entre fuerzas armadas y poder político," *Aportes*, 6, October 1967, pp. 30-43.

Pablo González Casanova, *Democracy in Mexico*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1970, *passim*.

Francisco González Pineda y Antonio Delhumeau, *Los Mexicanos Frente al Poder: Participación y Cultura Política de los Mexicanos*, Instituto Mexicano de Estudios Políticos, México, 1973, pp. 303-306.

Pedro Guillen, "Militarismo y golpes de estado en América Latina," *Cuadernos Americanos*, XXIV, No. 3, Mayo-Junio 1965, esp. pp. 9-10.

Franklin D. Margiotta, "Changing Patterns of Political Influence: The Mexican Military and Politics," paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1973.

Lyle N. McAlister, "Mexico," in McAlister and others, *The Military in Latin American Sociopolitical Evolution: Four Case Studies*, American University Center for Research in Social Systems, Washington, 1970, pp. 197-258.

Martin C. Needler, *Politics and Society in Mexico*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1971, Chapter Six entitled, "The Political Role of the Military," pp. 65-72.

Peter Nehemkis, *Latin America: Myth and Reality*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1964, p. 54.

L. Vincent Padgett, *The Mexican Political System*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1966.

Karl M. Schmitt, "The Role of the Military in Contemporary Mexico," in Curtis A. Wilgus, ed., *The Caribbean: Mexico Today*, University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 1964, pp. 52-62.

Robert E. Scott, "Mexico: The Established Revolution," in Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba, eds., *Political Culture and Political Development*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1965, pp. 380-383; and *Mexican Government in Transition*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1964, 2nd ed. rev., p. 134.

Norman M. Smith, *The Role of the Armed Forces in Contemporary Mexican Politics*, M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1966.

Philip B. Taylor, "The Mexican Elections of 1958: Affirmation of Authoritarianism," *The Western Political Quarterly*, XIII, 3, September 1960, pp. 722-744.

Hans-Werner Tobler, "Las paradojas del ejército revolucionario: su papel social en la reforma agraria mexicana, 1920-1935," *Historia Mexicana*, 81, Julio-Septiembre 1971, pp. 38-79.

record of its activities -- and this fact makes it an extremely difficult subject for historical analysis. Contemporary Mexican institutions are among the most studied in Latin America. Yet civil-military relations since 1940 remain quite a mystery. For a country of Mexico's importance, its army is one of the least studied in Latin America. Indeed the contemporary Mexican military may be the most difficult such institution to research in Latin America. Certainly it is the most difficult national institution to research in Mexico. The few studies that have been completed, the statistical data that can be compiled, and the press and biographic materials that are available enable the historical analyst to gain only a cursory knowledge of post-1940 processes and seminal events. Without new field work the roles and contributions of one of Mexico's most important national institutions will likely remain the target of rumor more than serious analysis.\*

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\*The possibilities for research are quite limited -- but some do exist, mainly in archives and through oral interviews. Direct research through military libraries, archives, and interviews seems extremely difficult, but is not impossible. Lozoya, op. cit., Margiotta, op. cit., and McAlister, op. cit., are all based in part on informal interviews with a few officers. The main library at the Secretariat of National Defense is open to the public, but access to the general staff library requires special arrangements. The military archives are essentially closed, except to historians interested in pre-contemporary affairs.

Much might be learned from indirect research through nonmilitary archives and interviews: that is, from case studies of developments that partly involved the military and that generated considerable documents which were subsequently filed in various public government archives. For example, Agrarian Department archives surely contain voluminous material on political, economic, and even some military developments pertaining to the struggles of Rubén Jaramillo in Morelos since the 1940s, and of Genaro Vásquez Rojas in Guerrero since the 1950s. Other subjects might be the 1952 presidential election, the history of the FPPM and other examples of military populism, and the removal of the military sector from the party. This indirect approach would probably not produce much data on the army; but the researcher interested in such topics as agrarian struggles, electoral processes, leadership formation, or party development might nevertheless be able to test some specific propositions and highlight some activities concerning the army's participation in broader political processes.

### SOME SPECIFIC ROLES IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT\*

The army's continuing political roles relate mainly to conflict management. This is a major activity of party-government elites, especially since the resort to violence, or threat of it, is a relatively common and even institutionalized tactic used by discontented groups.\*\* Though civilian party and government leaders dominate the management of conflicts, army officers may be involved at almost each step. Their roles relate mainly to political communication (by conveying information upward to higher levels) and enforcement (by maintaining order on behalf of partisan elites).

In regard to political communication, army officers may affect political intelligence and interest articulation, especially in rural areas. Zone commanders are significant sources of political intelligence on state government activities for the Presidency and the Secretariat of Interior. In addition, the paramilitary peasant-based "rural guards" are under army command. A reason for their current existence is "mostly political: to provide to the government an extraordinary mechanism of information that leads to immediate knowledge of all subversive action in any corner of the country."\*\*\* Furthermore, army officers have evidently served since the 1940s as potential alternative channels for interest articulation. If discontented peasants feel that the state governor or other civilian officials have blocked their petitions from reaching presidential attention, peasant leaders have sometimes protested to the zone commander and sought his help in getting the president's attention.

The introductory examples also show that the army has served as a major instrument for political enforcement during conflicts. Zone commanders remain an important presidential agent for replacing state

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\* The best treatments to date of points in this section are in McAlister, op. cit., and González Pineda/Delhumeau, op. cit.

\*\* Conflict management among discontented cañeros is analyzed in David Ronfeldt, *Atencingo: The Politics of Agrarian Struggle in a Mexican Ejido*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1973.

\*\*\* Lozoya, op. cit., p. 81.

governors during crises. The army is frequently used to separate and prevent violence between rival political factions in provincial areas, while civilian officials seek to resolve the conflict. Electoral defense for the PRI, and suppression of political rebels and radicals, are other uses that the army has served. It has also helped the government to secure control over isolated, unruly rural areas. In this respect, the expansion of a government's politico-administrative control often follows from the extension of economic and social services to needy peasant populations. But in the process the traditional forms of local politics may be disturbed; and in high conflict areas such as Guerrero, the army may become an indispensable participant in the process.

Participation in policy decisions by officers of the regular army or Presidential Guard, however, is extremely unclear, even on questions whether or not to mobilize troop units. It has surely diminished at the federal level since 1940; and aside from normal bureaucratic and budgetary politics, there is no satisfactory evidence that it has not disappeared. It is more likely that some policy influence persists at state (i.e., zone commander) levels -- and in some states more than others. But research is also lacking on this point. Something can perhaps be inferred from enduring patterns of officer recruitment to formal political and bureaucratic roles (e.g., governor, congressman, subordinate to the secretary of the presidency, as well as many lesser posts). Such participation has declined but far from disappeared. Indeed, the constant recruitment of officers as personal aides by high-level government and party leaders is a frequently overlooked form of participation. Yet most such officers merely act as private individuals. As an indirect policy influence, it is conceivable, however, that officers serving in military or nonmilitary posts can affect the formation of *camarillas*, and therefore the future of aspirant politicians within the PRI and the Revolutionary Family.\*

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\* Perhaps the close working ties between officials in the Secretariats of Interior and National Defense is one factor that has facilitated the frequent presidential candidacy of the secretary of government.

In sum, it appears that the army and its officers have remained significantly involved in political activities. Instrumental roles in political communication and enforcement predominate, but some policy-making influence cannot necessarily be discounted. The Mexican army is of course much less active politically than its counterparts in other Latin American countries. But if one focuses on the lesser political conflicts rather than on attempted coups and other major public disturbances elsewhere in Latin America, then it would appear that the Mexican army is not much less active than its counterparts, especially in relation to the control of agrarian struggles.

It seems likely, moreover, that the army's performance of its residual political roles has made a significant difference for the Mexican political system. Had the army behaved as a strictly professional and apolitical military that was mobilized domestically only in case of major disturbances, the president would have lost considerable capacity to control state governors. Both the president and governor would have lost considerable control over isolated rural areas. And, in general, government and political elites would most likely have had to increase their dependence upon police and para-military forces, whose conduct would probably be much less professional and politically more manipulable than has been the contemporary Mexican army. Although the comparison is difficult to draw, I would even suggest that the army has had greater political impact than any opposition party, including PAN.

#### IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL SYSTEM: FOUR CURRENT THEMES

How important are the army's continuing political roles? Four broad themes have been used to characterize their relationship to the broader performance of the political system. According to one theme, the army serves in political as well as military capacities *as a major institutional pillar of the government*.<sup>\*</sup> The missions of the army center on the protection of the president and the Revolutionary party-

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<sup>\*</sup> An apolitical nonpartisan version of this interpretation is found in Mexican government documents and military publications such as *Revista del Ejército* and *Armas*.

government institutions, and the defense of the Constitution. The military (including the Presidential Guard) and the PRI form the acknowledged pillars of government stability and elite integration, and moreover the PRI has sometimes needed army support to help maintain control of certain localities. Party strength has allowed general reliance on the military to subside over the decades. Yet there is continued, if only incidental, dependence upon the army and its officers for electoral defense, internal security, enforced subordination of local to presidential interests, political intelligence, and even as an alternative channel for interest articulation by discontented peasants. All these indicate a continuing, politically significant, partisan role for the army as a defender of the established institutions in those circumstances where party or bureaucratic mechanisms may prove inadequate, especially in isolated rural areas.

According to a second theme, individual army officers have served *as important participants in the broad ruling coalition*, the Revolutionary Family.\* Through the president in particular, civilian elites certainly predominate. But some officer participation in, and support for, the Revolutionary Family has helped and perhaps been essential to maintain the presidential supremacy and the elite integration upon which civilian dominance and political stability have depended. Of course, the influence of individual officers varies greatly from time to time and place to place; but in certain respects civil-military coalitions remain a factor in Mexican politics as in many other Latin American countries. This is particularly true in the case of certain state administrations.

Whereas the first two themes relate to the potential bases of partisan roles, the third and fourth describe the consequences. From the third perspective, Mexican political structures have attained some valuable attributes of democratic responsiveness, and PRI supremacy has been essential for their development. Just as the substantial centralization of government control over the military helped

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\* Standard U.S. academic analyses cited in a previous footnote have provided major sources for this interpretation.

to establish certain democratic procedures in civilian institutions, so in recent decades the army's performance of its residual political roles has enabled that institutional framework to remain very stable despite considerable socio-economic problems and periodic political opposition struggles. Moreover, through civic action, the army has helped to establish government services in isolated rural areas. Therefore, the army deserves credit *as a partner for political responsiveness and democratization.*\*

A fourth tentative interpretation, however, is virtually the obverse. Its proponents focus on the authoritarian and inequitable processes that persist in the Mexican political system. During recent decades certain government and party factions (reportedly including military as well as civilian elites) have afforded powerful resistance against legitimate pressures for increased democratization of party politics or for increased responsiveness to lower class socio-economic demands. The army has played a major conservative role in this process, helping to defend the institutional status quo against political struggles, opposition, and public disorder. Therefore, it is concluded, the army has behaved in part *as a significant force for authoritarian control and occasional political repression.*\*\*

It should be noted that these are not alternative or mutually exclusive interpretations. They could all be partially valid. Indeed, it is fairly common for governments to respond to demands from some sector while simultaneously seeking to repress certain activities or groups associated with it.

Mainly because of roles as a policy instrument, my impression is that three of the four broad interpretations have considerable merit: namely, the army's political significance as an institutional pillar

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\*This interpretation is common in official Mexican publications, though stated in an apolitical sense.

\*\*In various versions this interpretation has been most strongly argued by certain Mexican intellectuals, by the radical opposition, and by PAN leaders. A representative PANista expression is Gerardo Medina Valdés, *Operación 10 de Junio*, México, 1972, second edition.



of the government, as an agency for limited democratization under the PRI, and as a force for authoritarian control. Lack of evidence makes the interpretation of army officers as essential participants in the broad ruling coalition seem less convincing. But for that matter, except for presidents, cabinet members, and governors, the importance of other civilian government and party elites in the Revolutionary Family is also difficult to clarify in Mexico's centralized system. In any case, these interpretations indicate that the army's roles have had partisan consequences in Mexico's contemporary political development.

### III. FACTORS AFFECTING THE ARMY'S RESIDUAL POLITICAL ROLES

As noted, the post-1940 history of the army is quite obscure. The available, historical sketches generally treat it as a gentle evolution of trends established around 1940, and highlight only such major events as the removal of the military sector from the PRI. Yet it is not even clear whether that development took the military further out of politics, or conversely concentrated its lessening influence in the executive bureaucracy closer to the president.

In what ways have army roles changed since 1940? What factors may account for such changes? And what may be the future implications? These questions may be approached by considering, first, conditions internal to the military institution, and second, developments in the external context.

#### INTERNAL MILITARY CONSTRAINTS: LIMITED PROFESSIONALISM

The original measures to bring the army under central control during the 1920s and 1930s imposed strong internal obstacles to military participation in politics on either an individual or institutional basis. These measures, as treated in various writings, include: the rotation of zone commands so that officers do not acquire large personal followings; the splitting of infantry commands around Mexico City among the Presidential Guard, the Secretary of National Defense, and the I Zone Commander; retention of political generals in top commands; political control of the promotion and assignment system; limitation of the size, budget, and equipment of the armed forces; establishment of professional education and training programs; the encouragement of private economic, rather than political, profiteering by individual officers; and also -- since 1940 -- government restrictions placed on military relations with the United States and with hemispheric security activities. These and other measures have reportedly served to centralize civilian control, discourage military rebellions, focus loyalty on the established party-government institutions, and foster limited military professionalism.

The trend toward institutional professionalism is often singled out as having inhibited political participation. Yet the relationship

is quite uncertain and a different interpretation may be added.\* Professionalism within the Mexican army has certainly increased since the 1940s, but it has not attained a high level. One reason is the constant circulation of officers between military and other government, party and business posts, combined with the essentially part-time status of many officers. In addition, the professional education and training programs for the officer corps are apparently less advanced compared to the South American systems, where officers study the entire development of their societies as well as strictly operational matters.\*\* A further sign of sub-professionalism has been the erratic promotion and retirement practices, which until recently resulted in a very top-heavy and aged officer corps in the upper ranks.\*\*\* Thus, whereas the original reorganization constrained the potential for military participation in politics, keeping the military less professional in various respects that inhibit military autonomy has subsequently served to strengthen civil-military unity so that the army could be used for political purposes under civilian control.

Constraints placed upon political concerns within the military appear to be very effective. Generational differences between older and younger officers and bureaucratic disputes involving the army

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\* Earlier studies on general civil-military relations argued that professionalism would lead to depoliticization. Recent studies, reflecting on the roles of the South American militaries, show that professionalism leads to changes in the modes of military participation in politics without necessarily reducing the level of participation. See Luigi R. Einaudi and Alfred C. Stepan III, *Latin American Institutional Development: Changing Military Perspectives in Peru and Brazil*, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, R-586-DOS, April 1971; Richard L. Maullin, *Soldiers, Guerrillas and Politics in Colombia*, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, R-630-ARPA, December 1971; and Elizabeth H. Hyman, "Soldiers in Politics: New Insights on Latin American Armed Forces," *Political Science Quarterly*, September 1972, pp. 401-418.

\*\* This comment does not refer to Mexico's military medical schools, which are excellent and might serve as models for the improvement of civilian medical schools, according to Charles N. Meyers, "Demand and need for doctors in Mexico: a reply," appearing in Spanish in *Demografía y Economía*, VI, No. 1, 1972, pp. 99-106.

\*\*\* Margiotta, op. cit., provides broad data on recent institutional developments and the living conditions and career patterns of officers.

occasionally surface. Yet the picture that emerges is one of a highly unified and well-disciplined corps. Indeed, while factional divisiveness has sometimes appeared within three major institutions responsible for Mexico's historical political stability (the PRI, the federal bureaucracy, and the Catholic Church), the one national institution in which elite integration has consistently appeared to persist is the military.\*

Still, internal arrangements within the military institutions do not fully account for the changing roles of the army. Many of the changes that originally helped constrain its impact on Mexican politics (e.g., rotation of zone commanders) have been undertaken in other Latin American countries with only marginal effect, confirming that internal military developments are only part of the answer.

#### THE EXTERNAL POLITICAL CONTEXT: FOUR PERSPECTIVES

The course of the army's political roles since 1940 probably depended more upon developments in the external political environment than upon the internal institutional changes discussed above. Most importantly, while Mexico's Revolutionary elites incorporated the army

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\* Reports vary, however. According to Daniel Cosío Villegas, "Un país en dura prueba," *Visión*, 8 April 1972, pp. 8, "Two great unknowns confuse the present condition of Mexico. . . . The second is the army. No one knows for certain what it is like today, since it is commanded by entirely unknown leaders and officers. There is no lack of persons who fear that in a crisis it would incline toward a politics of order at any cost."

Manuel Moreno Sánchez, *Crisis Política de México*, Ed., Extemporaneos, México, 1970, pp. 77-78, distinguishes between older and newer officer generations: "That minority [group that forms the privileged oligarchy] is supported by high-ranking military officers under the pretext of defending the institutions, in spite of distrust and discontent among the younger officers. They [i.e., the high-ranking officers] consider every inconformity against the established institutions to be threatening or prejudicial."

A. U.S. analyst, McAlister, op. cit., p. 245, says that the army's air force officer ranks contain a group of technocratic reformists who would like to expand military contributions to national development, especially in the civic action and education fields.

According to González Pineda/Delhumeau, op. cit., p. 305, the officer corps contains political outlooks as diverse as those found in the broader civilian middle classes.

into politics in order to later exclude it from overt roles, they also fashioned strong party and government institutions on which to base their rule and manage conflicts.

In Mexico today, problems of political conflict have been subjected to four alternative -- though not exclusive -- interpretations. These identify unrest and violence as being (1) permanent and developmental in nature; (2) periodic or cyclical in character; (3) subversive in origin; and/or (4) the manifestation of institutional crisis. Each has had different implications for military roles. The army exists to deal with violent and potentially violent conflict; and conflict, of course, cannot be interpreted apart from the context in which it occurs.

#### Permanent Developmental Unrest

According to the first interpretation, the varied unrest is essentially permanent and developmental in nature. Mexican politics has always been somewhat violent, coercive, and anarchistic; and rural and urban unrest, student rebellions, intra-elite frictions, etc., have never been particularly uncommon since 1940. There were workers' strikes during the presidency of Miguel Alemán, intra-elite difficulties under Ruiz Cortines, wide-ranging unrest during López Mateos' first years in office, and student, agrarian, and intra-party conflicts under Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. Yet, despite changing conditions, and despite variations in presidential policies, the basic structure of the post-Revolutionary institutions has remained relatively stable, intact, resilient, and progressive, capable of simultaneously increasing both responsiveness and repression.\*

Indeed, all political systems are naturally characterized by a certain amount of unrest and violence: and it appears that different

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\* This seems to be the standard, most widely accepted interpretation, elements of which I have only sketched here. The best full account is found in Roger D. Hansen, *The Politics of Mexican Development*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1971.

stages or conditions of development seem to be characterized by different types or patterns of unrest. Thus, major peasant revolts have typically occurred in post-feudal economies and societies that are undergoing a new centralization and bureaucratization of political power and authority. This may be currently the case in the state of Guerrero, though no longer in Mexico as a whole. Under later conditions of modernization, urban unrest in the form of electoral shifts, student rebellions, and worker discontent may become a natural, even temporarily routine, pattern. This has recently been the case in some of Mexico's cities.

To the extent that this general interpretation is valid for contemporary Mexico, we can expect that the current government and its successors will continue to manage pragmatically the occasional conflicts and challenges, as have their predecessors. Fundamental institutional change will not necessarily result -- though government policies may take somewhat new directions following the historical alternation of "reformist" and "consolidationist" presidents. Military political roles will continue to be residual in nature, probably declining as the resilient post-Revolutionary governments strengthen their administration in rural areas.

#### Periodic or Cyclical Unrest

A second interpretation -- in a sense a variant of the first -- is that some unrest is periodic or cyclical in character: it is the natural accompaniment of a presidential (or gubernatorial) succession and the consolidation of a new presidential regime in power in the Mexican system. A pattern appears to have developed whereby the initial and final years of a presidential regime are the most opportune times for pressure groups to demand attention to their particular grievances. During his final years an outgoing president (or governor) can make concessions at lowered personal political cost, or that might relieve his successor from the onus of a difficult or unpopular move in his early years. On the other hand, during the initial years in office, while a new president is forming his regime and impressing himself upon his role, he may be most vulnerable to interest group

pressures. Consequently, groups with old and new grievances may mobilize and compete fiercely for federal attention.\*

Though to some extent this cyclical unrest resurges during every presidential succession, an outstanding case appears to have occurred during the changeover to López Mateos. He was confronted with an extremely diverse set of political and economic pressures, in part inflamed by the hemispheric impact of the Cuban Revolution. Important -- and often interrelated -- problems and developments reportedly included:\*\*

- o an intra-elite struggle between Cardenista and Alemanista elements, combined with public appeals for more leftist policies by ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas himself;
- o slowdowns in foreign investment, private business fears of a deteriorating business climate; and some threatened flight of domestic wealth;
- o a resurgence of communist agitation and subversion;
- o the formation of radical movements among intellectuals (the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, MLN), and peasants (the Central Campesina Independiente, CCI);
- o widespread peasant unrest and demonstrations, such as that led by Vásquez Rojas in Guerrero state;
- o student agitation and rebellions among normal school and university students;
- o a severe railroad workers' strike, and an attempt by leader Demetrio Vallejo to secede with his following from the C.T.M.;
- o rightist Church reactions;
- o constant criticism of the PRI as an unrepresentative and undemocratic organ;
- o pressures from young army officers for better pay and benefits;
- o electoral difficulties for the government in several states, including open armed revolt against the state governor in Guerrero;

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\* My statement of this interpretation expands upon comments in: Taylor, op. cit., esp. footnote on p. 19; González Casarova, op. cit., pp. 14-17; and Scott, op. cit., p. 201.

\*\* An addition to other sources cited, Olga Pellicer de Brody, *México y la Revolución Cubana*, El Colegio de México, 1972, México contains illuminating research.

- o and foreign policy problems with Cuba and the United States.

This reads much like the agenda of political troubles that have confronted President Echeverría: the similarities are striking, though perhaps less severe. I would not be surprised if some military resurgence in politics were regarded as quite possible during the 1958-1962 period.

The regime of López Mateos responded with pragmatic, maneuverable policies that he declared to exemplify the extreme left of Mexican nationalism within the Constitution. These included:

- o the jailing of certain communist and radical leaders and the suppression of allegedly communist-influenced demonstrations, and rebellious activities;
- o symbolic and verbal soothing of the Revolutionary Family's left wing, ultimately combined with a reaffirmation of Family unity through the appointment of all ex-Presidents to government posts;
- o pay increases for the army;
- o an expansion of the public sector of the economy into areas long ago targeted because of majority control by foreigners;
- o laws which allowed worker participation in profits;
- o increased attention to land reform, *ejidal* agricultural systems, and rural credit;
- o reimbursement for nationalized business interests and economic measures concerning inflation and the foreign debt, which encouraged private enterprise;
- o and a neutralist policy toward Cuba, declared independence from the United States, and expanded relations with the rest of Latin America.

Thus, despite a few dire predictions of internal upheaval, despite intra-elite conflicts, and despite an economic slowdown, political stability was restored. Once again, there are certain similarities between these policy directions and those taking effect now.

If the cyclical interpretation of political unrest in Mexico is valid, a period of skillful maneuvering and bargaining by the then incumbent president will enable the incidence of unrest to subside and the political system to restabilize itself along durable traditional lines. There may be temporary new directions in policy (especially in



the foreign affairs and public economic sector areas), but major institutional changes will be prevented or forestalled. Accordingly, the military may seem sporadically quite active, but its roles continue to be essentially residual.

### Subversion

According to a third perspective, a major reason for some of the unrest, radical organization, and occasional violence is simply subversion. From one slant, local and international communist and non-communist revolutionaries have occasionally targeted Mexico. The 1958-1959 labor unrest, the 1965 guerrilla front in Chihuahua, the 1967 arrest of alleged Maoists, the 1968 student riots, the conversion of Guerrero state's leading social bandit into a revolutionary figure, and the recent formation of the Revolutionary Action Movement (MAR), are all sometimes said to confirm the practice of international and domestic subversion in Mexico.\* Most of the so-called subversive violence in Mexico, however, has been treated by the government and the military as criminal activities that require little more than policing actions. From another slant subversive activities are also attributed to right-wing imperialist or neo-fascist elements.

To the extent that the subversion perspective has validity (and it seems much less valid than the other interpretations), then its implications depend upon domestic conditions within Mexico, and on the analysis made by military elites. If the current manifestations of unrest are cyclical or developmental in nature, then the major policy consequences of subversion might be somewhat greater government attention to the limited problems of discontent, and/or temporarily more active security roles for military and police agencies, and/or slight

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\* On the Chihuahua guerrilla episode, see Prudencio Godines, Jr., *Que Pasa Mad...Era!* de José Santos Valdés, publisher unknown, 1968, and compare with José Santos Valdés, *Madera, Razón de un Martiriología*, Imprenta "Laura," México, 1968. On the 1967 Maoists, see Cecil Johnson, *Communist China and Latin America, 1959-1967*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1970, pp. 274-280. On the MAR, see John Barron, "The Soviet Plot to Destroy Mexico," *Readers Digest*, November 1971, pp. 227-268.

shifts in foreign policy directions. However, if an institutional crisis were to arise in Mexico, then the opportunities might increase for subversion to affect institutional stability, policy directions, and military roles. A military analysis that treats such activities as essentially criminal ones that require little more than a policing response is not likely to lead to an expansion of the army's political roles, in contrast to an analysis that the subversion or insurgency results from dangerous conditions that require political and socio-economic as well as security responses.\*

#### Institutional Crisis

A fourth interpretation holds that Mexico may be entering, or has now entered, a period of institutional crisis, and that political unrest and violence are manifestations of this condition. Accordingly, the very success of political and economic development has brought Mexico to a point where force will be increasingly required to maintain the political system if reforms are not enacted. In essence, the potential crisis is said to consist of an excessive concentration of power in the presidency, the unresponsiveness of government bureaucracies to popular needs, and the unrepresentative and undemocratic features of the government party. Though to some extent these have been long-term features of Mexico's political development, they have never before been tested in a context of such: generational gaps and pressures from newer against older traditional elites in most major institutions; economically inequitable rural-urban conditions; population, employment, public service, and patronage pressures; electoral abstentions and voting shifts in some modernizing urban centers; structural needs to reduce dependence on the U.S. economy; open reliance on military, police, and paramilitary forces for maintaining public order; and a multiplication of organized interest groups

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\* See Maullin, op. cit., and Einaudi/Stepan, op. cit., for extensive discussions and examples of this point.

and elite sectors with often contradictory factional demands.\*

If this interpretation is correct (and it has not been entirely convincing so far), then skillful maneuvering by the president and other members of the Revolutionary Family may periodically restore a semblance of stability and temporarily forestall any major changes. Yet, in the long run, forces inside and outside the established institutions will persist and may ultimately bring about major institutional changes, whether resulting in a more democratic, populist, or authoritarian system.

The development of an institutional crisis could have -- but would not necessarily have -- profound effects on the military's residual political roles. As Mexican officials have repeatedly observed, the two institutional pillars of stable government are, and will continue to be, the official party and the army. Developments that led to an increasing ineffectiveness of civil-military conflict management techniques, and that also involved a marked weakening of party control, would tend to make government elites more dependent upon army support in order to maintain internal political order, and to defend federal over state and local interests. Severe challenges to PRI supremacy from without, and deterioration from within, would probably induce some expansion of the political roles of the army.

#### CONCLUDING COMMENT

Whichever interpretation one prefers, it seems likely (as working hypotheses) that the endurance of the established Mexican political

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\* While not necessarily reflecting all these brief points, some significant Mexican writings on the subject are Daniel Cosío Villegas, *El Sistema Político Mexicano, Las Posibilidades del Cambio*, Ed. Joaquín Mortiz, México, 1972; Manuel Moreno Sánchez, *Crisis Política de México*, Ed. Extemporáneos, México, 1970; Carlos Fuentes, "La Disyuntiva Mexicana," pp. 147-193 in his *Tiempo Mexicano*, Ed. Joaquín Mortiz, México, 1971; Pablo González Casanova, *La Democracia en México*, Ed. Era, México, 1965; L. Darío Vasconcelos, *Madrado, Vos Postrera de la Revolución, Discursos y Comentarios*, Costa-Amic, México, 1971; Antonio Delhumeau and others, *México: Realidad Política de Sus Partidos*, Instituto Mexicano de Estudios Políticos, México, 1971; and Fernando Carmona and others, *El Milagro Mexicano*, Ed. Nuestro Tiempo, México, 1970.

As a word of caution, it should be pointed out that ever since the 1940s one set of Mexican intellectuals or another has argued that this country was suffering from some serious institutional crisis.

system has depended -- and will continue to depend -- significantly upon the army's performance of its residual political roles. They remain important for party-government stability and for elite integration. The elucidation of these considerations is not to deny that Mexico has a highly civilianized political system by Latin American standards, but to point out that -- especially in contrast to U.S. professional standards -- the Mexican military has continued since 1940 to be engaged in a number of inherently partisan political activities, especially at the middle-levels of the regime, and that the army's performance of these roles and responsibilities has been important for the visibility of the established institutions. Indeed, attempts to eliminate (or conversely to expand) the residual political roles would probably lead to political instability. This suggests that Mexico, while having a resilient political system of distinctive genius, is not so unlike other Latin American countries, and that there are limits to the extent of demilitarization that can benefit or be achieved in a developing Latin American country.